

40 WEEKS EARL BLUMENAUER #2 Streetcar A National Renaissance 40 IDEAS

Background

A century ago, streetcars defined American communities of all sizes, sparking their economic growth, shaping their development, and linking growing neighborhoods with shopping, jobs, and recreation. They were so universal that you could travel from Boston to Chicago by streetcar and urban rail lines with a total gap of less than 20 miles. But by the 1950s, competition from a growing auto industry, legal requirements for electric companies to diversify, and the desire to become more 'modern' slowly strangled streetcar systems from coast to coast.



Rep. Blumenauer with Mayor Mark Mallory of Cincinnati (future home of a streetcar line)



Inspecting the work on the Grand Ave. line in Portland

Solution

Today, a half-century after the extensive streetcar networks in cities around the country were destroyed, this simple yet effective transportation mode is poised to make a renaissance in American cities. In the last decade, streetcars have staged a remarkable comeback. In 2001, Portland reintroduced the first modern streetcar to great fanfare and ridership that continues to vastly exceed projections. But this is not just another Portland phenomenon; a growing number of communities – from Kenosha, Knoxville, Seattle, San Francisco, to Charlotte and Ft. Worth – are eager to invest in streetcar and benefit from its ability to provide more transportation choices, cleaner air, fewer carbon emissions, and more development opportunities. This interest has spawned a truly national movement, as more than 80 communities are now seeking federal funds to get started on their first projects.



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